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AUTHOR	Gherman, Paul M.
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ABSTRACT

The management field of Organization Development approaches institutions from the social, technical, and economic systems with major emphasis on group process. Organization Development contains many possibilities for libraries and their staff to meet the challenge of our greatly changing environment. This paper outlines the methods by which an Organization Development Team could be created and operate at Wayne State University Libraries. (Author)

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Organization Development for Libraries

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SUMMARY

The management field of Organization Development approaches institutions from the social, technical, and economic systems with major emphasis on group process. Organization Development contains many possibilities for libraries and their staff to meet the challenge of our greatly changing environment. This paper outlines the methods by which an Organization Development Team could be created and operate at Wayne State University Libraries.

ORGANIZATION DEVELOPMENT FOR LIBRARIES

Since childhood, most of us have functioned in a hierarchical authority structure. Whether it was in the family, the schools, the army, the work place, or even in confrontations with service organizations, we have learned the methods of communication and the channels of power. In hierarchical organizations, decisions were made at the top, and the information contributing to these decisions filtered through the various levels of the organization.

Recently, management has realized that due to the hierarchical structure, information vital to their decision making is trapped or insulated at various levels of the organization. They have also realized that in implementing their decisions, they meet resistance due to the non-involvement of the lower levels of the organization. Added to these problems is the overload of information processing at the higher levels. To alleviate these problems, new models of organizations are being developed which free the information flow and involve people at all levels of the organization in the decision process. The new models known as grid or matrix organizations assemble task forces or teams drawing persons from all levels who have the expertise to solve specific problems.[1] Most of these teams are short lived, are diagonal in composition and exist only until a specific problem is solved. Inherent in these new organizational models are new rewards of accomplishment for employees and improved decision making for management. Also there are a different set of conditions which can lead to an entirely new set of problems both for the individual and the organization. Lines of communication and channels of power shift with each new team and each new problem causing a high level of ambiguity and anxiety among the staff. Certain individuals who had attained positions of prominence in the hierarchical organization may find themselves excluded from the decision process in a matrix organization. Others who contributed to the decision process in the past, may find themselves unequipped with skills that facilitate group decision making.

To develop both management and employee skills at group decision making, the new management field of Organization Development has become increasingly important. Organization Development takes a "gestalt" approach to organizations in that it is both diagnostic and proscriptive in looking at all facts of an organization. In Organization Development, such areas as the fiscal policy, the physical setting, the formal structure, the informal communications as norms, to name only a few areas, are studied and possibly changed to bring about organizational health. Organization Development draws heavily upon the social sciences both for its theory and practice. One of its major tools is experience based learning through laboratory training. By using a trained group leader in a laboratory setting, both management and employees can gain insight into both the group process and their personal social skills, without the threat or consequences of real life confrontations.

In a participatory management, the organization must develop a consistent and unique conceptual model of its organization. Many assume that participatory management is only another term for the Labor Union vs. management model which works on conflict and compromise mode, a method sadly lacking for a true problem solving operation. Even one individual operating in this mode could retard the entire decision making process. Another commonly held conceptual model for participatory management is the democratic principle of, "one man-one vote". The application of this method to problem solving generally leads to merely the expression of individual preference and conflict avoidance rather than a constructive dialog by which attitudes are changed and new plateaus of thinking are achieved.

At Wayne State University Libraries, the dominant conceptual model has been one of a federation of departments and divisions. Each division of these departments has defined its own goals and objectives. This arrangement has, over the years, developed strong small group allegiances which have contributed greatly to the quality of Library Systems. However, in recent years, increasing outside forces have been brought to bear on the total organization. These forces have at times caused departmental goals and objectives to be in conflict with the global health of the organization. At the same time, individual allegiances have remained with their departments, and there have been few "integrator"[2] agents to bring about conceptual change in the organization.

The Director of Libraries has established a committee system that can utilize group input in the definition of global goals and objectives and the solution of global problems.[3] However, the members of these committees view themselves as delegates from their original groups charged with defending their parochial interests. Allegiances are developed, compromises attained but solutions to global problems are sidelined. They are conflict-adjusting groups instead of conflict-resolving groups.

In professionally based organizations the exalted position of the expert is another major obstacle to group decision making and management by consensus. In professional organizations, each professional or group of professionals has a specialized body of knowledge available to them which gives them power in their area of the organization. It is impossible for another group in the organization to challenge this expertise for they must respect that body of knowledge to gain mutual respect for their own area. Therefore, without trust, lateral consensus in a professional organization is close to impossible. Hierarchical or legitimate power is also reduced in a professional based organizations, because in most instances, the administrators are themselves from the same profession and must concede to the power of expertise. For instance, a hospital administrator who was once an obstetrician, when making a decision concerning the cardiology department, will in most instances, have to concede to the expert knowledge of the cardiologist. Professionals in these organizations are more reluctant to accept input from technical supportive staff for the same reasons, so that diagonally formed problem solving teams are less apt to suceed.

The majority of the problems inherent in participatory management can be decreased or resolved by increasing our knowledge of the organization's structure, and our perceptions of how we relate to the various groups we function with in the organization. To this end, it is suggested that a "Library Organization Team" be initiated as was proposed earlier this year. However, the decision of this team would go way beyond its

original charge of monitoring the various resource committees. The Library Operation Team would work in the following areas:

I. Data of Organizational Health

The Library Organization Team should be responsible for developing and administering a questionnaire to determine the staff's perceptions of the organization. The questionnaire should cover areas such as cooperation, goals and objectives, conflict resolution, receptiveness of the administration etc. From this data, a model can be constructed to show areas where perceptual change or organizational change is necessary.

II. Integrator Agents

The Library Organization Team should also act as integrator agents[4] in that they should sit in on the various committee meetings as observers. As observers, they will not be allowed to contribute in any substantive manner to the meeting. They will clarify positions and develop the various communication styles of the group members. Obviously, this group should participate in group training before they can function as integrator agents.

III. Third Party Consultants

They will act as third party consultants[5] between hostilities of any Library staff members, helping these people identify, process and resolve their conflict.

IV. Library Organization Workshops

Members of this group will conduct workshops with groups involving interpersonal abilities.

Obviously, none of these changes can be carried out without the full consent of the groups or individuals. Therefore, the Library Organization Team will only function when specifically invited to do so.

The Team should work independently of the administration or any other group or individual and should be under recall only by the consensus of the Librarians' Assembly.

Selecting the members of the Library Organization Team will be the most difficult task. The members should have strong social and communication abilities. They should be marginal people who have no set allegiances to a particular group. They should have a strong self-awareness. They should be accepted by the group. They should not be either appointed or elected to the team. Rather, they should be discussed and agreed upon by consensus of the Assembly as fitting the various criteria.

However, the efforts of any Library Organization Team toward improving the group's decision-making will be useless unless we as individuals are willing to develop our self-perceptions and restructure our organizational format. We have to look at ourselves and see what role we play in the group process. We have to decide whether this role aids or retards correct decision making. Are we open minded, do we develop a climate of trust where one can criticize another and in turn be critized without fear of personal jeopardy? Do we listen or do we only wait to speak? Do we preserve logic and not individual need? Do we avoid conflict and look for compromise?

As Librarians, we have built a norm of conflict avoidance, probably out of defensiveness over our tenuous position as professionals. Also, our resistence to openly criticize may stem from our position as experts in specific areas. We say, "You don't criticize me in my area; I won't criticize you in yours. Agreed."

CONSENSUS VS. MAJORITY DECISIONS

To aid us in making valid group decisions, we must also alter our organizational format or by-laws which postpone or circumvent vote taking. In the past, in the Librarians' Assembly, we arrived at two types of decisions.[6] We have made consensus decision where all agreed upon a solution. Although we took a vote to satisfy the by-laws, the outcome was already known to every member of the group. Whatever was voted upon could therefore be easily implemented.

When a majority decision is made, a far different set of circumstances exists. Generally debate and conflict are strong, and the two sides are solidified in their positions. When one side makes a motion, they hope to gain the power position and impose their position on the minority. In passing the motion, a solution has not been found; the conflict has only been adjusted, not resolved. And since only part of the staff agreed with the solution, implementation will be ineffective. Two examples of the failure of majority vote in recent months at Wayne State University Libraries have been over the staffing of the Catalog Assistance Desk, (CAD) and Peer Evaluation.

The CAD problem was not settled because we had avoided the most crucial problem; that of Library Objectives. One portion of the staff felt a strong allegiance to their department or division and believed that service on the CAD had a negative effect on their first objective. Another segment of the staff viewed service at the CAD as a worth while endeavor and saw this service as synonymous with the objectives of the Library. Until we can openly discuss this central issue, we will merely be trying to arrange schedules which side step the issue. The volunteer plan was a conflict adjusting move of the first order--no one could be dissatisfied with the outcome. However, the major conflict was only side-stepped. Individual preference was accepted rather than a consensus of objectives developed.

The Peer Evaluation conflict, because of its volatile nature, was not even discussed. It was put to a vote of individual preference. Individual preference is not a solution; it is only a show of force. Many who disagreed with Peer Evaluation are those same individuals who have seldom attended meetings of the Librarians' Assembly. They are persons who viewed all forms of group participation in a negative light. Without discussion, obviously the only solution is avoidance. We have allowed vote taking to become our major conflict avoidance mechanism.

The Parliamentary procedure or Roberts' Rules of Order, after which our by-laws are patterned, work well for the protection of individual and power group rights. But they fail to develop a climate conducive to group decision making or participatory management. If the organization's format reinforces individual power groups in their position, limits communication, develops an atmosphere of conflict aversion and reduces the area of social skills, then they should be changed.[7] We need to develop a fluid structure where our social skills can develop, and we can learn to function on new planes of communication.

Another factor contributing to the Librarians' Assembly's failure at decision making may be its size. Whether group of 20 to 25 persons can come to consensus decisions might be questioned. We might again consider the membership of the Assembly. Originally, it was to be patterned after a "town-hall" concept where membership was to vary with each meeting. Those present were members; those not present were not members. This may be a concept we should consider again. Presently, we make most major decisions by ballot by which many members vote on a problem which they have

not contributed to the discussion. Solely casting a vote does not contribute to a solution; it only chooses a solution.

As individuals in the participatory management setting, we cannot expect to deliver our solutions to problems at the feet of the administration and have them accepted. Nor can we simply sulk in our tent when they are rejected. The true meaning of participatory management is to bring our ideas and positions to our peers. There in the group setting, we can process our ideas and develop solutions. And these solutions, if agreed upon by consensus, can then be presented to the administration with a far greater chance of their acceptance and implementation.

THE ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

The major reason for participatory management is to break down the barrier between those who plan in an organization, and those who implement those plans. This is to be accomplished by involving the staff who implement in the planning process. However, what has happened here in the Library is that we have merely inverted the structure. The staff work in committees developing plans and Library operations. These plans are then presented to the Department Heads for acceptance and implementation, and at this point, the process breaks down. The Department Heads have not been involved in the planning and they reject the plans. The situation is even worse than under a strictly hierarchical structure because those who implement also hold the legitimate power and can veto any plan without opposition. To correct this condition, new organizational structures must be developed which will involve line management more fully in the planning process. Historically, librarians have been divided between technical process and public services which are again divided according to subject areas. New management structures should be looked at that cut across these divisions and view libraries as different processes.

Above all, we must come to realize that the Library is not only a technical system, but that it is also a social system. We have contributed countless man-years to developing the technical system. On the other hand, we have spent little or no time in developing our social system. Yet the social system rests at the very center of our ability to function in an organization. In the end, we must analyze, define and control our own ecology which is the delicate balance between our social and technical systems that interlock with our professional ethics and values, or we will fail to meet the forces of change.

Paul M. Gherman

NOTES

[1]Argyris, Chris. "Todays Problems With Tomorrows Organization." Journal of Management Studies. Volume IV, no. 1. (1967). pp. 32-33.

[2]Galbraith, Jay. Designing Complex Organizations. New York, (1973).

[3]Pings, Vern M. "Organizational and Administrative Relationships." Wayne State University. July, (1973).

[4]Galbraith. op. cit.

[5]Walton, Richard E. Interpersonal Peacemaking; Confrontations and Third-party Consultation. Reading, Mass., (1969).

[6]Frick, Elizabeth. "Some Thoughts on Decision-Making by Consensus." Bulletin Cornell University Libraries. July, (1973). pp. 14-15.

[7]Allen, Lawrence A. and Barbara Conrary. "Social Interaction Skills." Library Trends. Volume 20, (1971). pp. 78-91.

[8]Holley, Edward G. "American University Libraries Organization and Administration." ERIC 063958. pp. 5-6.